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Title: Yes-no question/marking in Italian dialects : a typological, theoretical and experimental approach

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In this dissertation, the syntax of yes/no question-marking in the Italian dialects was explored from a typological, theoretical and experimental perspective. The aim of this final chapter is to provide an outline of the core findings of the present work. First, I will summarize the research questions tackled in the previous chapters. Then, I will discuss some remaining questions and issues for further research.

A typological overview of the yes/no question-marking strategies attested in the Italian dialects was provided in chapter 2. The data available in the literature were complemented by new fieldwork data. It was shown that a wide number of typologically diverse strategies may be employed in the Italian dialects, whereas only interrogative intonation is available in Standard Italian. A summary of the strategies found in the Italian dialects is provided below:

- QP;
- Interrogative word order;
- Interrogative intonation;
- Interrogative verb morphology;
- Interrogative verb morphology + QP;

Furthermore, it was investigated whether the yes/no question-marking strategies attested in the Italian dialects may fit into a broader typology of polar questions as proposed by Ultan (1978), Sadock & Zwicky (1985) and Dryer (2005).

I showed that a strategy attested in all Central and Southern Italian dialects poses a challenge for such standard typological classifications. This strategy involves the use of a QP, followed by a finite form of the verb *fare* 'do'. *Fare* may or may not share the features of the lexical verb in different dialects. An example contrasting an agreeing form of *fare* with an invariable one is provided in (1) below:

- 1) a. Chi faciti nisciti?
 QP do-PRES.3.Pl go.out-PRES.3.Pl
 'Are you going out?'

[Cosenza]

- b. Che fa sciate?
 QP do-PRES.3.Sg go.out-PRES.3.Pl
 'Are you going out?'

[Castro dei Volsci, FR]

Sentences including an invariable form of *fare*, like (1.b), can be easily classified as polar questions headed by a single, sentence-initial QP. It is not possible to extend the same reasoning to sentences including an agreeing form of *fare*, as they display a more complex structure.

In addition, the possible correlations between the distribution of the strategies available in the Italian dialects and other parameters were explored. It was shown that a further isogloss should be added to the Massa-Senigallia line, namely one that separates the dialects that have a sentence-initial QP homophonous with the *wh*-word corresponding to *what*, and those that don't.

Despite the wide availability of morphosyntactic devices, it was shown that Interrogative Intonation seems to be the only strategy that is specifically dedicated to yes/no question-marking in the Italian dialects. Most morphosyntactic devices employed to mark polar questions are actually employed in a number of different contexts, such as optative, concessive, hypothetical and imperative clauses. This suggests that a specific type of morphological marking may in fact correlate with veridicality (or the absence thereof) rather than with sentence type.

In chapter 3, the focus of the discussion was narrowed down to the syntax of *che fare* questions in Sienese. As discussed in chapter 2, this construction is problematic because it doesn't seem to align with any other yes/no question-marking device attested in the world's languages. In addition, *che fare* questions may look like biclausal discourses containing two questions at first sight. More specifically, a biclausal discourse containing a *wh*-question and a yes/no question. A minimal pair is given in (2) below:

- 2) a. Che fai esci?
 QP do-PRES.2.Sg go.out-PRES.2.Sg
 'Are you going out?'
- b. Che fai?
 what do-PRES.2.Sg
 Esci?
 go.out-PRES.2.Sg
 'What are you doing? Are you going out?'

[Sienese]

In order to unambiguously establish the syntactic status of *che fare* questions, I provided an in-depth analysis of their syntactic properties and underlying structure. It was shown that there are several restrictions that apply to *che fare* questions, which do not apply to biclausal discourses. These constraints are summarized in (3) below:

- 3) a. *Fare* and the lower verb must share phi-, tense, mood and aspect features.
 b. Only a single negation is allowed.
 c. The subject cannot occur between *fare* and the lexical verb.

A further difference between *che fare* questions and the corresponding biclausal discourses is provided by theta-role assignment. *Fare* may combine with verbs that do not assign an agentive role to the subject in *che fare* questions. On the contrary, only verbs that assign an agentive theta-role to their subject may combine with *fare* in biclausal discourses of the type illustrated in (2.b)

For these reasons, I argued that *che fare* constructions are monoclausal yes/no questions in Sienese. I proposed an analysis to account for their underlying structure and syntactic behavior from a theoretical perspective. A schematic representation of the syntactic structure of *che fare* questions in Sienese is provided in (4) below:

- 4) a. Che facesti dormisti?
 QP do-PAST.2.Sg sleep-PAST.2.Sg
 ‘Did you sleep?’
- b. CP[che C[facesti TP[dormisti VP[*pro* VP[~~dormisti~~]]]]]

It was argued that *che fare* questions instantiate an AGREE relation involving two probes and one goal. *Fare* and the lexical verb are probes, and they both AGREE with the subject in SpecvP. Following Chomsky (2001), I assumed that AGREE is delayed until phase completion. Once the phase head *fare* is merged in C, the two AGREE relations are established simultaneously. This means that the subject is active when it enters both AGREE relations, as they take place at the same time. In addition, it rules out any potential problems related to the Activity Condition and the Defective Intervention Constraint (Chomsky, 2001).

If this approach is on the right track, the structure of Sieneese *che fare* questions provides additional evidence for AGREE not to be necessarily limited to one-probe-one-goal relations (cf. Hiraiwa, 2001; Béjar & Rezac, 2009; van Koppen, 2005; Nevins 2007, 2011; Rezac, 2008).

In order to find some empirical evidence and check the data against the theoretical claims made in chapter 3, a production experiment was conducted. This was the topic of chapter 4, where the prosodic properties of *che fare* questions and the corresponding biclausal discourses in Sieneese were investigated. The main question addressed in this chapter is whether Sieneese speakers use any prosodic cues to distinguish between *che fare* questions and the corresponding biclausal discourses when they form a minimal pair. Since I argued that *che fare* questions are distinct from biclausal discourses, I expected them to systematically correlate with different prosodic patterns. In addition, I expected *che fare* questions not to be able to host of any prosodic break within their clause boundaries, if they are monoclausal constructions.

The results of the experiment showed that this is indeed the case. Sieneese speakers produce a significant difference between minimal pairs of *che fare* questions and biclausal discourses when it comes to duration. This difference is well above chance level (84,4%). It was shown that the duration of *fare* and of the inter-stress interval between *fare* and the following word are significantly longer in biclausal discourses. This was expected, as a result of the Vowel Lengthening that takes place before clause boundaries. At the same time, the difference between the duration of *fare* and of the inter-stress interval between *fare* and the following word in biclausal discourses and *che fare* questions strongly suggests that there is no boundary in *che fare* questions. Hence, it supports the idea that they are monoclausal constructions.

Furthermore, the results show that 49% of the biclausal discourses contain a pause between the *wh*-question and the yes/no question. On the contrary, no speaker produced a pause that corresponded to the potential clause boundary in *che fare* questions. This provides additional evidence for the monoclausal status of *che fare* questions in Sieneese, as monoclausal constructions should not allow the presence of any prosodic break within their clause boundaries.

As opposed to duration, melody turned out not to be a reliable prosodic cue to distinguish *che fare* questions from the corresponding biclausal discourses. The study of

pitch movement included in chapter 4 showed that the size, duration and steepness of the fall occurring on *fare* do not make a significant contribution. These results show that timing is often the overriding cue when it comes to clause boundaries in Sieneese *che fare* questions, as opposed to melody.

Summarizing the findings of this dissertation, it was shown that a rich variety of typologically diverse yes/no question-marking strategies are employed in the Italian dialects, as opposed to Romance and Standard Italian. Not all these morphosyntactic devices can be easily classified into one of the main categories proposed in standard typological classifications of polar questions in the world's languages (cf. Dryer, 2005). One of these devices involves the use of a QP in combination with a dummy verb that shares the features of the lexical verb of the question (labeled *che fare* questions in the present work). Although these constructions may look like biclausal discourses including two questions at first sight, theoretical and empirical evidence show that this is not the case.

On the theoretical side, the results of four syntactic tests show that *che fare* questions display a different syntactic behavior from the corresponding biclausal discourses, and hence that they should be analyzed as monoclausal yes/no questions. The agreement morphology showing up on the dummy verb and the lexical verb is the result of two AGREE relations that take place simultaneously. These AGREE relations involve two probes (the dummy verb in C and the lexical verb in T) and one goal (the subject in SpecvP).

On the empirical side, the results of a production experiment provide additional evidence for the monoclausal status of *che fare* questions. Speakers produce a significant difference between *che fare* questions and the corresponding biclausal discourses when it comes to duration.

The results of this dissertation provide promising new insights into the syntax of polar questions. At the same time, however, they raise a number of issues that require further research. First of all, it is necessary to find out whether a thorough investigation of dialectal data from languages other than Italian may provide additional evidence for implementing the existing typological classifications. The variation attested in Italian dialects shows indeed that the architecture of the existing typologies might have to be reorganized in order to accommodate the data. More extensive typological research on cross-dialectal syntactic variation is needed in order to show whether this is the case.

A second issue raised in the present discussion concerns the morphological marking of non-veridicality. Data from Northern, Central and Southern Italian dialects show that the same morphosyntactic devices employed in yes/no questions are frequently employed in many other non-veridical contexts. A parallelism was drawn between interrogative inversion in Northern dialects, and the placement of sentence-initial QPs in Central and Southern dialects. This parallelism suggests that these dialects may mark veridicality (or the absence thereof) rather than clause type. It would be worth to look at more dialectal data from both Italian dialects and other languages to check whether any similar pattern is found. If this approach is on the right track, we might have to rethink the morphological marking of yes/no question in terms of non-veridicality marking. I leave it to future research to establish whether the morphological encoding of non-veridicality is actually a property of the Italian dialects or of language in general.

A further issue that could potentially shed more light on the syntax of polar questions in the Italian dialects concerns some diachronic aspects of yes/no question-marking. A

working hypothesis was proposed in chapter 3 in order to account for the syntactic and semantic differences between Siennese and Sicilian *che fare* questions. It was argued that *che fare* questions might be the result of a process of reanalysis involving a biclausal discourse, as suggested by their morphological shape. Siennese *che fare* questions are monoclausal polar questions, but in fact they still retain some of the original features of biclausal discourses. Although *fare* has lost its semantic features, it still acts as a main verb in that it needs to establish an AGREE relation. Sicilian *che fare* questions instantiate a further stage of this process, where *fare* has lost all of its verbal features to become an invariable particle in the Left Periphery. A thorough diachronic investigation is needed to find empirical evidence to support this hypothesis.

A final issue that emerged from the present discussion regards the contribution of a perception experiment to our understanding of the prosodic differences between *che fare* questions and biclausal discourses in Siennese. The results of the experiment discussed in chapter 4 show that speakers associate distinctive prosodic cues to *che fare* questions and the corresponding biclausal discourses when it comes to production. It would be interesting to check whether the same sharp distinction is maintained when it comes to perception.

In this dissertation, I have shown that exploring the syntax of yes/no question-marking from a typological, theoretical and experimental perspective provides a fresh view on cross-dialectal syntactic variation. Further research will contribute to the exploration of this fertile area of research in the future.